



Civil Sunday Holiday

ESR

Ellet Joseph Waggoner

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
-------------------	---

The Rev. D. Atkins, writing of the American Sabbath Union, in the *Pacific Methodist*, and of its efforts to secure a law forbidding Sunday traffic in the government's mail and military service and in interstate commerce, says:-*CSH 2.1*

"This is a timely movement, one which will meet the approval of the entire Christian church, and all lovers of law and order. There are some who will oppose it on the ground that the State should not interfere with the conscience of its subjects. But we must not ignore the fact that the Sabbath is a civil institution as well as a religious. While no one could wish Congress to enact laws enforcing practices of religion upon unwilling consciences, yet even religious services ought to be protected, and all men who desire to worship ought to be protected by law in performing their peculiar and chosen rites. As a civil institution the Sabbath may be enforced by law. Congress has declared certain days to be holidays, and no one complains that personal liberty has been infringed. If three or four days of the year can be thus distinguished by Congress, what is there to prevent so distinguishing one day in seven, if it seem proper to do so?"*CSH 2.2*

This is a fair specimen of the way in which those arguing for a Sunday law mislead the people as to the real purpose of the law. It may be that it is not intentional, because we are sure that many of these who are working for the law do not really know what they want or why they want it; but it is too bad that on so vital a question as this the people should be kept in the dark as to its true nature.*CSH 2.3*

The statement that the Sabbath is a civil as well as a religious institution is very common; but we never yet knew anyone to take the time to attempt to prove the statement. Let us examine it for a moment. The leaders in the Sunday-law movement themselves declare that the sole authority for the Sabbath is the fourth commandment. Rev. Herrick Johnson says that the anchorage of the Sabbath is in the fact that it is a divine institution. Col. Elliott F. Shepard, the president of the American Sabbath Union, declares: "We do not rest this work on mere human reasoning; we rest it wholly and directly on the divine commandment." Rev. J. H. Knowles, editor of the *Pearl of Days*, says: "It will become more and

more apparent that the real defenders of the day are those who regard it as divine, not merely a human institution.” And we heard Colonel Shepard say in one of his speeches that “it is useless for anyone to claim that the Sabbath has any rights except as they plant themselves on the divine commandment.”*CSH 3.1*

With these statements we most heartily agree; but how do they agree with the statement that the Sabbath is a civil as well as a religious institution? What is a civil institution? A civil institution is one which originates among the citizens of the State. But how about the fourth commandment, upon which alone it is claimed rightly that the Sabbath rests? God gave it himself. Moses, after repeating the commandment to the children of Israel, said: “These words the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the mount, out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice; and he added no more. And he wrote them on two tables of stone.” *Deuteronomy 5:22*. Again he said to the people: “The Lord spake to you out of the midst of the fire; ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments, and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.” *Deuteronomy 3:12, 13.CSH 3.2*

When the law was delivered from Mount Sinai God came down with ten thousands of his holy ones. *Deuteronomy 33:2*. The angels of heaven were there, but no man was there. The people were forbidden to draw near the mount under penalty of death; but there was little danger of their drawing near, for the terror of the scene caused them to stand afar off, and even Moses said, “I exceedingly fear and quake.” Man had nothing whatever to do with the enactment of the Sabbath commandment. Still further, the Lord declares that the Sabbath was given solely that the people might know that he is the God who sanctifies them (*Ezekiel 20:20*), and he declares the proper keeping of the Sabbath to be the highest act of worship, for he says that those who turn away their foot from it and do not do their own pleasure on it shall delight themselves in him. *Isaiah 58:13, 14*. There is nothing of a human element in the commandment. It is religious and wholly religious.*CSH 4.1*

It is true that it has been a civil institution in some of the States, but

in so doing the States did something that they had neither the right nor the power to do. This, however, is the chief argument upon which the advocates of a national Sunday law depend. They say that the Sabbath is a civil institution, that the States have all enacted laws concerning it, therefore the general government has a right to enact laws concerning it. But the fact that the States have enacted laws concerning it does not prove that they had any right to do so. As we have already seen, the Sabbath is wholly religious; it has upon it the stamp of God, and not a human stamp. It belongs to God and to him alone, and he says, "Render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's."*CSH 5.1*

If one should find a British coin, and should erase the image of the queen and stamp it with an eagle, and attempt to pass it as a United States coin because it had the United States stamp upon it, would avail him nothing. The point is, the coin had no business to have the United States stamp upon it, because it was a coin of Great Britain and belonged to that country. This is exactly the position that it is wished to have the States assume toward the Sabbath. The Sabbath has the stamp of God upon it. Those who are working for the Sunday law would have that stamp effaced and have the stamp of the United States put upon it. Then they would say, "Why, it is a civil institution, and therefore the State has a right to enforce it;" but the fact is, the State had no right to make it a civil institution. To do so it acts the part of a counterfeiter. No matter what action the States takes, the fact remains that the Sabbath belongs to God and should be rendered to him alone, and to him directly, and not through the medium of some other power.*CSH 5.2*

Another point may be noticed in this connection, and that is that even though the Sunday had civil as well as religious features, it is admitted by those who favor its enforcement that the civil features cannot be enforced separate from the religious features. Rev. W. F. Crafts (Washington, Dec. 12, 1888) said that a Sunday law cannot be maintained except on the basis of moral obligation; that if you take the religion out of it, you take the rest out; and the whole thing is aptly put in the following paragraph taken from a sermon by Rev. Byron Sunderland, published in the New York *Evangelist*:-*CSH 6.1*

“The champion for the secular leagues, in the course of a long speech, in which on several grounds he violently assailed the movement, at last gave his cause away by declaring that he did not object to a civil Sunday, and would help to enforce it. No man can make such an admission, and not go to the end with those who seek to retain a Christian, which is the rational observance of our American Sabbath unimpaired. It is simply impossible to have a civil Sunday, that is, a day of rest from ordinary secular occupations, and yet exclude from it a voluntary religious observance. The distinction forcibly reminds me of a certain Lord-bishop who said, “Oh, but you know, John, I don’t swear as a *bishop*, only as a *man*!” ‘That is true, your grace,’ replied the valet; ‘but I was thinking when the devil comes *after the man*, what would become of the *bishop*?’” *CSH 6.2*

This is well put. Even if we should allow that the Sunday is a civil institution as well as a religious institution, the undeniable fact remains that when Sunday is enforced it is enforced as Sunday, with every feature that it contains, religious as well as civil. *CSH 7.1*

The writer of the paragraph first quoted says: “While no one could wish Congress to enact laws enforcing practices of religion upon unwilling consciences, yet even religious services ought to be protected, and all men who desire to worship ought to be protected by law in performing their peculiar and chosen rites.” That is exactly what we have now without any Sunday law. We can’t tell whether it is ignorance or perversity that makes Sunday-law advocates use such an argument, for nothing is more certain than that every State has laws amply sufficient for the protection of religious services. It is true that all men who desire to worship ought to be protected by law in performing their peculiar and chosen rites, and it is as true that under our Constitution and laws, as they now are, all men may be so protected. But let the Sunday-law movement succeed, and the state of things will be reversed. Then only a class will be protected, and others will be left to the mercy of bigots. When a rabid Sunday-law advocate says that all men ought to be protected, he means simply that all men who believe as he does ought to be protected, and that all others ought to be prohibited from carrying on their peculiar and chosen rites. *CSH 7.2*

The argument used last by Mr. Atkins is the worst one we have ever seen. Speaking of the fact that Congress has designated certain days as holidays, and that no one claims that this is an infringement of personal liberty, he says that "if three or four days of the year can be thus distinguished by Congress, what is there to prevent so distinguishing one day in seven, if it seems proper to do so?" Does he mean to intimate that all the American Sabbath Union wishes is to make Sunday a holiday like the present national holidays? If he does, he means to convey a wrong impression; for the great complaint of the Sunday-law advocates is that Sunday is already used as a holiday. They want a law passed which will *prohibit* its being used as a holiday. The difference between a holiday and such a day as they wish Congress to make of Sunday is as great as the difference between light and darkness. On any holiday people may abstain from labor if they wish to, but there is no compulsion. Anybody who wishes to work a part or a whole of a day is at perfect liberty to do so. More than this, the national holidays are generally devoted to pleasure-seeking by a large majority of citizens; but those who wish Congress to pass a law enforcing Sunday observance, wish a law to prohibit work and amusement. *CSH 7.3*

Suppose that an attempt should be made to compel people to abstain from all work and all amusement on the Fourth of July. There would be a general protest. True, patriotic citizens would think such a law an infringement upon the rights of the people, and so it would be. But that is just what these people want Congress to do for Sunday. It is strange that any man would attempt to build an argument for Sunday laws upon the existence of national holidays. It shows either that the man wishes to make sentiment for the Sunday law, regardless of the method, or else that he has never given the matter any thought further than that he wishes a Sunday law at whatever cost. *CSH 8.1*

E. J. WAGGONER.

